

NCA
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INDIA FLOODS: HOW TO CONTROL THEM

ANNCR:

THE UNUSUAL SEVERITY OF THIS YEAR'S MONSOON FLOODS IN INDIA, HAS ONCE AGAIN FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEM OF FLOOD CONTROL. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM NEW DELHI:

VOICE:

EACH YEAR THE MONSOONS COME, EACH YEAR RIVERS OF NORTHERN AND EASTERN INDIA OVERFLOW THEIR BANKS, DESTROYING HOMES AND CROPS, OFTEN DESTROYING PEOPLE TOO, BY THE THOUSANDS. AND, EACH YEAR, THE CRIES GO UP FOR FLOOD CONTROL MEASURES. THIS YEAR THE CRIES WILL BE LOUDER, BECAUSE THE DAMAGE AND LOSS OF LIFE HAVE BEEN SO MUCH GREATER. PART OF THIS IS THE RESULT OF THIS YEAR'S EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG MONSOONS. BUT EXPERTS SAY THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE MONSOONS HAVE BEEN AGGRAVATED IN RECENT YEARS BY THE ACTIONS AND FAILURES OF MAN.

ONE MAJOR FACTOR IS SOIL EROSION IN THE HILLS AND MOUNTAINS WHERE THE RIVERS ORIGINATE. FOR TOO MANY YEARS NOW, LAND HUNGRY FARMERS, AIDED IN SOME CASES BY UNSCRUPULOUS TIMBER MERCHANTS, HAVE BEEN REACHING HIGHER AND HIGHER INTO THE FOOTHILLS AND REMOVING THE TREES THAT HOLD THE SOIL IN PLACE. THE RESULT HAS BEEN THE BLIGHT OF A SPREADING MOUNTAIN DESERT. BUT JUST AS BAD, FROM THE STANDPOINT OF FLOOD CONTROL, IT HAS MEANT SERIOUS SILTATION PROBLEMS DOWNSTREAM. WHEN RIVER CHANNELS BECOME BLOCKED, THE SURGING WATER FROM THE MOUNTAINS BREAKS DOWN EMBANKMENTS IN SEARCH OF NEW CHANNELS ON THE WAY TO THE SEA, AND THEN YOU HAVE FLOODS.

IN ORDER TO COMBAT THE SILTATION PROBLEM, EACH YEAR THE STATES ALONG THE WAY TO THE SEA HAVE BEEN FORCED TO MOUNT DREDGING OPERATIONS TO KEEP THE REGULAR CHANNELS OPEN. THIS YEAR, IT IS CHARGED, ALMOST NOTHING WAS DONE IN THE WAY OF DREDGING BY TWO STATES, BIHAR AND UTTAR PRADESH, ALTHOUGH FUNDS HAD BEEN SET ASIDE FOR THIS PURPOSE. INDIA'S EIGHTEEN MONTH OLD JANATA GOVERNMENT HAS ASSIGNED A HIGH PRIORITY TO FLOOD NEWSPAPERS CONTROL IN ITS SIXTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN. BUT AS A NUMBER OF INDIA NEWSPAPERS HAVE POINTED OUT EDITORIALY, SIMILAR AMBITIOUS PLANS HAVE BEEN PUT FORWARD NUMEROUS TIMES IN THE PAST WITH FEW APPRECIABLE RESULTS. FURTHERMORE, SAY THE EXPERTS, IT IS DOUBTFUL HOW MUCH GOOD ANY FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM WILL DO UNLESS SOMETHING IS ALSO DONE TO HALT SOIL EROSION IN THE HILLS AND MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN INDIA AND NEPAL.

WJL/PY